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SECOND COMMITTEE
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held on
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at 3 p.m.
New York

# SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

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| Chairman: | Mr. HAMBURGER | (Netherlands) |
| later: | Mr. DJABBARY (Vice-Chairman) | (Islamic Republic of Iran) |

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 97: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(b) SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 (continued)

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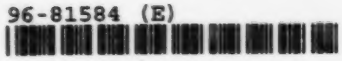

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/87, A/51/131, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/211-S/1996/551, A/51/295, A/51/357, A/51/462-S/1996/831, A/51/375)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/76 and Add.1, A/51/510)

(b) SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 (continued) (A/51/420)

1. Mr. SYCHOU (Belarus) said that, with regard to Agenda 21, global problems and the decrease in the financial resources allocated for the achievement of sustainable development should be the principal subject for discussion at the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. The 1997 special session should be used to draw up a strategy for practical activities at the international and national levels in order to reinforce momentum for the implementation of Agenda 21. His delegation shared the opinion of the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development that the special session should result in the adoption of an agreed document in the form of an action-orientated declaration. The elaboration of such a document could be started at the fifth session of the Commission.

2. His delegation had participated actively in the pan-European environmental protection process, and welcomed the decisions adopted at the Third European Ministerial Conference on the Environment, held in Sofia in October 1995. It appreciated primarily the decisions on the programme of activities for Central and Eastern Europe, including the newly independent States. It should be understood that the movement of countries with economies in transition towards sustainable development and their integration into the world economy were interlinked processes. He reiterated his Government's intention to convene an international conference of countries with economies in transition to be held in Minsk in April 1997, which was open for participation and support from all interested parties, international and regional organizations, countries and institutions. His Government would create the necessary conditions to ensure that participants in the conference could carry out productive work. The conference would be a significant all-European contribution to the preparations for the Special Session on review of the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. Mr. FAWAZ (Lebanon) said that desertification was a threat to the entire international community owing to its general impact, which forced affected countries to seek assistance from other countries. Various strategies had been adopted in a number of countries, but the problem persisted. Desertification was associated with poverty, ignorance and unstable political conditions, and the situation was therefore critical. Even if solutions seemed to be evident in most cases the application of those solutions was not. It was important to approach the problem on an international level and in a practical manner, not just theoretically in international forums. No country could solve the problem

of desertification or escape its consequences single-handedly, because if it did it would be transferring the problem to its neighbours. Various factors were contributing to desertification in Lebanon: the reduction in the number of forested areas, the steady increase in the size of the population and the greater need for housing coupled with the consequent decrease in the number of open spaces, the increased incidence of forest fires in mountainous areas, the indiscriminate felling of woodlands, the indiscriminate use of pesticides and chemicals leading to environmental pollution, the lack of awareness by the population, and the continuing Israeli occupation of a large area of South Lebanon, in defiance of the international community and Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which called upon Israel to withdraw its forces from Lebanon unconditionally. Furthermore, the Israelis were pursuing a policy of systematically burning woodlands and prohibiting peasants from cultivating the land.

4. The Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture had adopted measures to prohibit the felling of woodlands, require 20 per cent of surface area to be planted with new woodlands, regulate the campaign against forest fires and prohibit the hunting of wild birds. There were plans to increase the size of forested areas by up to 200,000 hectares. The Ministry was also encouraging irrigation projects, road-building and soil conservation with the cooperation of international and regional institutions including the Bretton Woods institutions and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). In addition, his Government had heeded the call of the international community to clamp down on the cultivation of plants used in drug production. Lebanon was in the process of reconstructing its infrastructure, to which end a national strategic plan would be implemented with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

5. Mr. BHATTARAI (Nepal) associated his delegation with the views already expressed by the delegation of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. His delegation looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly for the review of Agenda 21, which it hoped would provide policy guidelines in the critical areas of sustainable development and adopt measures to achieve sustainable development goals, in particular through the provision of adequate financial resources, the transfer of environmentally sound technology and the creation of institutional mechanisms.

6. The development paradigms which had been in use for over four decades had resulted in only low growth for the economies of the least developed countries such as Nepal, where more than 40 per cent of the population lived in abject poverty. Those paradigms had resulted in a steady rise in population along with imbalanced population dispersal and erosion of natural resources. Consequently, the sustained economic growth and sustainable development of the least developed countries had become an uphill task. The developing countries were committed to implementing Agenda 21, but were prevented from doing so by a lack of adequate resources, appropriate technology, well-developed infrastructure and institutional mechanisms. In order to implement the Rio commitments, Nepal had ratified the framework convention on climate change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. His Government was also eager to participate in projects run by GEF.

7. Nepal's commitment to sustainable development was bolstered by its present political system of multiparty parliamentary democracy, a system which was conducive to the proper implementation of development plans. His country had adopted a liberal economic policy and an open-market system which supported sustainable development. It hoped that those efforts would be supported by the international community so as to enable it to carry out its responsibility for the preservation and protection of the environment. Nepal was doing its best to ensure that the outcome of its development efforts would benefit the poor, nature, women and children.

8. His delegation was of the view that the Commission on Sustainable Development should take into consideration the review of commitments and the identification of priority areas for future courses of action. In that connection, it also supported the Thai delegation's proposal that environment ministers as well as finance ministers should examine those matters together. The role of non-governmental organizations and of the private sector must be fully assessed during the overall review of Agenda 21. In the area of poverty eradication, the transfer of appropriate technology to the developing countries was of crucial importance. Special programmes also needed to be developed for the generation of productive employment.

9. His delegation believed that the special session of the General Assembly should not only review the progress achieved so far, but also formulate clear recommendations with respect to new resources and institutional mechanisms to implement the commitments of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Nepal trusted that the developed countries would abide by the commitments they had made at recent international conferences.

10. Mr. FERJANČIČ (Slovenia) said that he supported the statement made at a previous meeting by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union and associated States. Although a small country, Slovenia was one of the richest in terms of biological diversity. That fact increased his Government's responsibility for promoting sustainable development. Various forms of regional and subregional cooperation in Europe and in the Mediterranean basin were vital for complying with the spirit and recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The comprehensive approach of the countries concerned to the protection of the Alps was another good example of the implementation of Agenda 21, since tourism represented one of the most important economic activities in the region. The Convention on the Protection of the Alps could serve as a model for adopting a similar approach in other regions. However, it was not enough to involve only the ministries of the environment or the Governments of participating countries in its implementation; regional and local authorities, scientists, business circles and non-governmental organizations must also be involved in that endeavour.

11. His delegation strongly supported the proposals that the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 should be action-oriented and should serve to consolidate regional and global activities. Non-governmental organizations should play a key role in the follow-up process to the Rio Conference.

12. Mr. ELMEJRABI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that when the international community had adopted Agenda 21 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, it had realized that attaining sustainable development and vigorous economic growth would not be an easy task. Four years later, the same problems persistent and might even have worsened. That was why developing countries attached considerable importance to the follow-up to United Nations conferences. In that regard, the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 was of particular significance.

13. One of the issues to be addressed at that session was the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Particularly in Africa. That instrument provided a legal framework for the adoption of measures to remedy the problem of desertification in developing countries and thus respond to the concerns expressed in Agenda 21. In that regard, the international community's efforts would have to be focused on implementing the Convention's provisions and ensuring that financial assistance was provided to developing countries combating desertification.

14. It should be acknowledged that developing countries had carried out wide-ranging institutional reforms and were grappling with the problem of the external debt and declining terms of trade. The international community should help provide assistance to developing countries to enable them to attain the sustainable development objectives set by Agenda 21. In particular, they should provide technical assistance on soft terms for the transfer of environmentally friendly technologies which would consolidate environmental protection policies in developing countries.

15. The failure by the developed countries to honour the commitments entered into at Rio constituted a serious problem. At the same time, production and consumption patterns in the developed countries had contributed to the deterioration of the environment. Developing countries experienced many problems in trying to resolve their environmental problems without the cooperation of the international community. That situation was compounded by the conditions imposed on the developing countries in terms of restructuring and retrofitting and by the application of financial policies that had harmful economic and social consequences. Such factors prevented developing countries from adopting the appropriate environmental protection measures. Moreover, the need to adopt a strategy to deal with natural disasters and mitigate their impact should also be borne in mind. In that regard, the international community should understand the need for sharing experiences and information in that area and for focusing more attention on early warning systems.

16. At the national level, the embargo imposed on his country, which had already lasted a long time, should be condemned by the international community. That embargo, as well as the sanctions against his country, must be lifted. As far as desertification was concerned, notwithstanding the impediments placed in its path by some international powers, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had managed to build the canal to carry drinking water to the population living in the coastal areas of the country. Moreover, during the Second World War, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had been the scene of fighting between opposing armies which had left it infested with mines. As a result, his country's development efforts had been

slowed down; therefore, the countries that had laid the mines should provide technical assistance with a view to their clearance.

17. Mr. SURIE (India) said that the report of the Secretary-General on the special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/51/420) gave a comprehensive idea of the preparatory process undertaken by the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, as well as at the national level. India supported the participation of non-governmental organizations in that process and believed that the practices agreed to should also apply in a non-selective manner to other special sessions of the General Assembly and other areas of work of the United Nations.

18. The report had not specifically made an assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21. It did not contain any analysis or recommendations on the substantive aspects of activities which could be carried out in that respect during the preparatory process and in the post-1997 phase. India therefore looked forward to more detailed work in that area, particularly in the context of the meetings to be held in February 1997 by the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In carrying out that assessment, the Secretariat should be guided by the outcome of the previous sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development in which detailed intergovernmental analyses had been carried out. At those earlier sessions, the interrelationship between environmental problems and the socio-economic situation of countries had been recognized, as well as the difficulties experienced by developing countries in tackling global environmental problems. It had also been agreed that the industrialized world must take immediate action to tackle global environmental concerns. Unfortunately, the developed countries had not taken adequate steps to change their unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

19. As established in Agenda 21, the global partnership for sustainable development must be based on the transfer of new and additional resources to developing countries to meet their immense needs and enable them to achieve sustainable development. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, additional commitments had been undertaken at Copenhagen and Beijing and in the context of the conventions and plans of action which had been adopted to tackle the problems of desertification, climate change, small island developing States and biodiversity. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s was also being implemented. However, adverse changes had taken place, such as the decline in levels of official development assistance and the reduced real levels of the ninth replenishment of the International Development Association.

20. Another cause of concern was the lack of progress in the area of the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. The developing countries should have access to those technologies on preferential terms in order to promote global sustainability. In particular, access to technologies which were critical for agricultural and industrial development should not be denied under the pretext of alleged dual use. It would also be useful to develop a network to disseminate information on proven and environmentally sound technologies. It was unfortunate that the ad hoc working group on the transfer of technology of

the Commission on Sustainable Development had had to abandon its work after one year. India believed that work should also continue in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity in order to protect the rights of traditional holders of knowledge.

21. India felt that in order to continue and deepen the Rio partnership, the afore-mentioned lacunae must be addressed and an effective review must be carried out in 1997. In that review, attention should be paid to institutional issues such as the decisions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly concerning three-tier mechanisms for follow-up to conferences. Attention should be concentrated on some priority areas for action in the post-1997 phase, while ensuring that other areas were not ignored. Emphasis must continue to be placed on cross-sectoral issues, especially financing and the transfer of technology. Priority could be given to the sectoral issues of transport and energy, including renewable energy sources.

22. In conclusion, since environmental concerns found expression in diametrically opposite ways depending on economic situations and the geographical location of the countries concerned, efforts by the international community would become effective only when there was an emphasis on the human dimension of the consequences of environmental changes, which should be fully reflected in the post-1997 phase of implementation of Agenda 21.

23. Mr. TANASESCU (Romania) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by Ireland, at the 12th meeting, on behalf of the European Union and associated States, with regard to the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. A satisfactory output of that session would increase confidence in the capacity of the United Nations to continue the processes initiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the other major conferences held since 1992.

24. At the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly, the question of public administration and development had been considered, with a high level of representation and participation; it was regrettable that the resolution adopted on the subject reflected only partially the valuable ideas and suggestions presented by delegations. In order to avoid a similar situation at the special session in 1997, it was necessary to define clearly a few themes on which the debate should focus. Based on the information provided by the Commission on Sustainable Development, Romania had prepared a number of suggestions in that respect.

25. First, the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development had revealed an imbalance between the implementation of Agenda 21 at the international, regional and national levels. The entry into force of the legal instruments adopted as a result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had been the most outstanding achievement at the international level. Mention should also be made of the establishment of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, the conclusion of the Agreement for the implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, the adoption of the Programme of Action of the

Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the activities carried out in the context of the Global Environment Facility and the competent work of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. However, achievements at the national level had not been equally impressive. Consequently, at the special session, priority should be given to an analysis of experiences and difficulties at the national level in the implementation of Agenda 21. In Romania's view, the success of Agenda 21 at the global level would depend on efforts made at the national level.

26. Second, the session of the Commission on Sustainable Development had confirmed the need to further elaborate the conceptual aspects of sustainable development. For example, the indicators of sustainable development, the impact of economic globalization on the global natural environment, the relationship between sustainable development and sustained economic growth and the monitoring of natural processes at the global level could be addressed under a separate item. The deliberations on that item could include input from academic experts.

27. Third, the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the current debate on restructuring and rationalizing the United Nations system had shown that there was a need to define clearly the specific contribution of each part of the system involved in the implementation of Agenda 21. The final goal would be to ensure the complementarity of the work of the existing bodies, which would allow for a strengthening of horizontal cooperation. In Romania's view, the special session should be part of a long-term process, based on the cooperation of all the Member States, and, in that context, the session should be future-oriented, and should have concrete and not excessively ambitious goals.

28. Mr. Djabbary (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

29. Mr. HOLTHE (Norway) said that his Government was firmly committed to the follow-up to the Rio Conference, and stressed the importance of strengthening the process of international cooperation in the field of the environment and development. Priority should be given to the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, as well as the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1980 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. At the same time, the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level should be advanced through national legislation and initiatives as well as through official development assistance and private sector investments. Sustainable development at the global level could be achieved only through effective action at the local level.

30. The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 offered an opportunity to give new impetus to the work of the international community for sustainable development. That opportunity should be used to adopt authoritative decisions with a forward-looking perspective. To do so, it would be necessary to attract participation at the highest political level. In addition, non-governmental

organizations should be granted the right to participate both in the preparations for and in the actual work of the special session.

31. Norway was satisfied with the preparations thus far for the special session and with the role assigned to the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in those preparations. In its view, the contents of Agenda 21 and of the Rio Declaration should be formulated in terms of priorities for future work at the local, national, regional and global levels. Those priorities should be combined with concrete examples of how to proceed in practice. The highest priority should be given to such cross-cutting issues as work in the fields of sustainable forest management, changing production and consumption patterns, combating poverty, and the equitable distribution of wealth both within and among countries.

32. Mr. KA (Senegal) said that his delegation shared the views on the question of the environment and sustainable development expressed by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. With regard to the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, he hoped that the occasion would not constitute a mere ritual of declarations of intent or reopen negotiations on agreements already reached. While it was evident that, since the Rio Conference, progress had been made towards a greater collective awareness of the dangers inherent in the destruction of the environment, the implementation of the commitments undertaken left much to be desired. In terms of attaining the objectives set out in Agenda 21, much still remained to be done in such key areas as mobilizing resources, combating poverty, controlling population growth, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and transferring environmentally sound technologies.

33. Senegal was of the view that the special session should identify the real reasons for the failures and propose practical measures to guide future work. In any event, consensus should be maintained on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and on the polluter-pays principle.

34. Senegal, which was a party to all the conventions adopted as a result of the Rio Conference, had embarked upon a vast national campaign to promote greater public awareness in order to implement those instruments. He drew particular attention to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. In that connection, Senegal had established a framework for consultations and coordination through its National Commission for Sustainable Development and the Higher Council on National Resources and the Environment. The Government was also examining the possibility of establishing a national foundation on the environment, a project in which non-governmental organizations, the private sector and community-based organizations were involved.

35. Senegal had recently hosted a Ministerial Conference of member States of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel devoted to environmental education. The Conference had issued a declaration in which it had stressed the importance of defining a strategy to institutionalize environmental education within the education systems of Sahel countries.

36. His delegation welcomed the entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. Nevertheless, it regretted the lack of progress in the discussion on pending issues, particularly the question of mobilization of financial resources. It believed that the global mechanism envisaged for that purpose should not only be used for the compilation of information on resources and funding possibilities, but should also be mandated to mobilize and channel funds in accordance with the funding mechanisms provided for in the Convention.

37. Mr. DISEKO (South Africa) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement made earlier by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Approaches to the management of the world's environment and environmental resources had been fundamentally changed through the process that had been initiated with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. In addition, the linkages between the eradication of poverty and sustainable development had been reinforced through the efforts of the international community to implement the decisions and recommendations agreed to at the Conference. The principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration specifically articulated the need for attention to be given to the special conditions of developing countries. It had been disappointing to note that some of the commitments made during the Rio Conference, especially in the areas of technology transfer and financial resources, remained unfulfilled, thereby limiting the degree to which international cooperation had benefited developing countries.

38. The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 provided an opportunity to review what had been achieved in that area since the Rio Conference, and afforded the international community an occasion to reaffirm the priority which it accorded to the responsible management of the common environmental heritage for the enjoyment of future generations.

39. His Government supported the recommendation contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/420) that the special session should have a high-level political profile and should adopt an action-oriented declaration. In reviewing the implementation of Agenda 21, the special session should recognize that, despite the limitations which it might have, that blueprint for sustainable development represented a significant contribution. For that reason, his delegation considered that any debate which might be construed as an attempt to renegotiate Agenda 21 should be avoided and that efforts should focus on identifying problem areas in the implementation of Agenda 21 and developing solutions to those problems.

40. Mr. ESPERI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the special session of the General Assembly to conduct an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 in 1997 would provide a unique opportunity to identify and remove barriers to its speedy implementation. The special session should address institutional matters, in particular, the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development, taking account of the views of relevant United Nations bodies, the regional commissions, the World Trade Organization and multilateral financial institutions. The developing countries had striven to

achieve the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), but could do little alone. There was an urgent need, therefore, for the developed countries to carry out the commitments set forth in Agenda 21.

41. The eradication of poverty, which continued to be an overriding priority of the developing countries, was integrally related to environmental degradation and, therefore, should be viewed as the basis for joint efforts. The problems of internal migration and refugees caused by various factors, including war and environmental degradation, should also be adequately addressed. The new forms of protectionism in the environmental and social fields were disturbing the delicate balance between development and the environment and were in contradiction with the basic concept of "sustainable development", set forth at UNCED.

42. His country's strategies and policies in the field of sustainable development had led to various achievements. The Supreme Council on the Environment, which operated under the leadership of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Department of the Environment and the Forests and Rangelands Organization, had been restructured. The National Committee on Sustainable Development had also been established in accordance with the principles and recommendations of Agenda 21. In recent years, his country had developed strategies, policies and activities at the national, subregional, regional and international levels in various fields, including a health and environment strategy, protection of biological diversity, climate change, ozone-depletion reduction, the atmosphere, the oceans and seas, the development and use of renewable energy sources, management of internationally important wetlands, afforestation as well as combating desertification and drought.

43. Other recent activities included the adoption of new economic and financial instruments, the establishment of a programme office for the regional network of research and training in desertification control sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, cooperation with littoral States and the relevant United Nations agencies in tackling the serious environmental problems in the Caspian Sea and in protecting the marine environment, establishing fully equipped research centres in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, and the implementation of projects financed by the Montreal Protocol Fund and the Global Environment Facility.

44. Mr. IBRAHIM (Malaysia) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Agenda 21 was the grand plan for achieving sustainable development and an equitable future. Five years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the United Nations was to hold a special session to review Agenda 21, which would assess achievements, and identify obstacles encountered and decide how to overcome them. The financial contribution by developed countries in relation to their commitments would be assessed; and various innovative financial mechanisms to promote the implementation of Agenda 21 would be considered.

45. During the review, a meeting should be devoted to the private sector's role in development. Malaysia's development strategy recognized that sector as a partner in development and an engine of growth. The private sector was thus brought into direct dialogue with the Government at the policy formulation stage in outlining long-term plans and at the implementation stage of the annual budgetary process.

46. A meeting should also be devoted to non-governmental organizations, following the model of their consultations in the Council of the Global Environmental Facility. Non-governmental organizations could also play a leading role in the implementation of Agenda 21. After the Facility's restructuring, those organizations could attend Council meetings and participate more and more in small and large projects. In Malaysia, for example, the Government, the private sector and an international non-governmental organization were collaborating in a project to rehabilitate, conserve and maintain in a sustainable manner the diverse biological resources in a wetlands area covering approximately 1,000 hectares.

47. The basic theme of the special session should be the implementation of Agenda 21 in all its aspects. The session should not be a renegotiating forum to change what had already been agreed upon at the highest level at the Rio Conference. Lastly, clear linkages should be established between the implementation of Agenda 21 and activities resulting from other major United Nations conferences, which, while having agendas of their own, were not unrelated to the implementation of Agenda 21.

48. Mr. LENTON (United Nations Development Programme) said that, in response to the commitments made by countries at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had devoted considerable resources to environment and development activities at the country, interregional and global level. Sustainable human development had become the Programme's stated objective since the Conference; and the environment and poverty alleviation had been identified as key areas for UNDP assistance, along with sustainable livelihoods, gender equity and good governance. Environment initiatives had been consolidated within the new Division for Sustainable Energy and Environment.

49. UNDP had spent three years demonstrating that it was possible, through technical assistance, to help countries build the capacity to implement Agenda 21. There had been little additional official development assistance for the implementation of Agenda 21. In fact, less than 3 per cent of the sum considered necessary in Rio for its implementation had been received.

50. There appeared to have been a lessening of the concern that had led to the Earth Summit and of the sense of urgency about the adoption of preventive and corrective measures. There must be greater individual resolve, political will, financial commitment and corporate involvement; and efforts to ensure sustainability must be stepped up. UNDP was undertaking a series of special projects which could widen and deepen the assessment of progress, constraints and the prospects of Agenda 21 at the special session. Those projects included a case study to assess the resources of the Iwokrama rain forest in Guyana; the

dissemination of case studies of approaches, policies and measures that were providing appropriate responses to achieve sustainable development objectives, such as economic incentives or public/private partnerships; and the organization of several events in 1997 to highlight the experience of countries in implementing Agenda 21 at the national level.

51. UNDP believed that energy issues were at the heart of sustainable development and that current approaches to energy production, distribution and utilization were unsustainable in economic, social and environmental terms. UNDP stressed improved efficiency and increased utilization of renewable sources of energy. Energy was not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieve people-centred development. The Programme believed that the international capital markets and the private sector played a vital role in the promotion of sustainable energy concepts, since total private sector investments in energy far outweighed all flows of official development assistance to the sector.

52. UNDP also attached high priority to the implementation of the conventions and especially their integration into national programmes. With regard to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, the countries most affected by desertification were among the poorest in the world, including the least developed countries and those with the lowest rankings in the Human Development Index. That Convention was one of the principal tools for achieving sustainable human development in the affected countries and regions. He reiterated the Programme's commitment to support its implementation.

53. Mr. BASMAJIEV (Bulgaria) endorsed the statement made at a previous meeting by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union and associated States on the subitems under consideration. He also commended the Secretary-General's report on the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/51/420) and appreciated its timely publication.

54. His delegation attached high priority to the special session of the General Assembly, to be held in June 1997, and believed that it would be the most important event in the area of international cooperation for sustainable development since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The purpose of the special session should not be to renegotiate Agenda 21 or to redefine the principles and objectives of sustainable development, but rather to identify priority sectoral issues that required follow-up at the international level. The outcomes of other United Nations conferences held since the Rio Conference should also be taken into account in order to avoid duplication of ongoing work or work which had already been implemented in other international forums. His delegation hoped that the special session would meet its objective of maintaining the political momentum and giving a clear sense of direction for future actions to be taken by Governments, intergovernmental bodies and other relevant groups aimed at achieving sustainable development. The highest level possible of participation in the special session had to be ensured, and its outcome should be a declaration which would set out future actions and priorities for the promotion of sustainable development.

55. His delegation wished to reiterate its support for the Commission on Sustainable Development, which represented the most important instrument of the follow-up process to the Rio Conference. The Commission had managed to maintain its credibility and a high political profile. Attendance at the Commission's high-level session not only by ministers of the environment but also by ministers responsible for other relevant sectors should be further encouraged as a means of fully encompassing all the different aspects of sustainable development. His delegation also supported the Commission's current practice of not limiting its activities to its annual sessions, but providing a framework for a broader process of inter-sessional meetings. The Commission had ensured the participation of all stakeholders in the process of shaping the sustainable development agenda for the future. Its innovative methods of work and the efficiency of its secretariat had contributed to a great extent to heightening the international community's awareness of the importance of sustainable development. His delegation pledged its support to the Commission on Sustainable Development in the preparatory process for the 1997 special session.

56. Mr. A'ALA (Syrian Arab Republic) endorsed the statement made at a previous meeting by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Rio Conference had laid the foundations for global cooperation aimed at protecting the environment and integrating economic concerns into the concept of sustainable development. The recommendations of Agenda 21 and the commitments made at the highest level within that framework represented a fundamental achievement in international cooperation for development and the protection of the planet and its environment for present and future generations. However, the progress achieved in that regard had fallen short of the expectations engendered by the Rio Conference, since many States had not implemented measures to establish sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

57. The Syrian Arab Republic, conscious of the responsibility of national Governments with respect to promoting the concept of sustainable development, had taken a large number of measures aimed at implementing the decisions and recommendations of the Rio Conference. A Ministry of the Environment had been established, which was proof of the high priority that his country accorded to the protection of the environment. That Ministry was carrying out studies and analyses aimed at integrating environmental issues into national social and economic development strategies. Moreover, various measures had been enacted to reduce air, land and sea pollution.

58. At the regional and international levels, the Syrian Arab Republic had participated actively in the meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment held in May 1996. At the suggestion of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), that meeting had urged Arab States to participate in the special session of the General Assembly to be held in 1997 and had requested the various countries to establish national committees to prepare national reports on the implementation of Agenda 21, as a prelude to the preparation, during the meeting of the Council to be held in November 1996, of a comprehensive study for submission at the special session.

59. In his delegation's view, the agenda of the special session to be held in 1997 was of crucial importance; it hoped that the negotiations would not reopen

discussions on commitments that had already been made at the Rio Conference. The special session should consider the progress already achieved and the difficulties encountered thus far, and draw up guidelines for the activities to be carried out in the next few years. The international community should commit itself to creating an international environment that would be propitious to the fulfilment by the developing countries of their commitments in the area of the environment. To that end, it was necessary to promote the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on concessional terms. The special session should stress the common responsibility of all countries, since environmental problems affected not only one State, but the whole world.

60. Finally, his country had acceded to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa and was adopting legal measures to ratify that Convention.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.